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ABSTRACT

Career development specialists need to find ways to adapt their knowledge and skills to become agents of social action. Public policy is one area where career development specialists can involve themselves to help bring about social change. This paper attempts to raise the consciousness of Society of Vocational Psychology (SVP) members and to sensitize them to potential interactions regarding their role in linking career development to public policy. It highlights work being done in career development and public policy, and provides information to broaden the knowledge-base of those interested in this area. Theories are suggested for conceptualizing and organizing public policy as it related to work and career. Career specialists can help redefine public problems by using terminology conveying a different view of an existing problem. In addition, they can contribute to many policy issues by: (1) helping with links between models and delivery systems; (2) defining roles of parties involved in guidance services; (3) delineating which models are appropriate for counseling; and (4) designing evaluation programs and outcome studies to assess quality of guidance and psychological services. (JDM)

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Career Development and Public Policy

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Introduction

Traditionally, career development specialists have not been players in the social action arena, but there is a need for them to be involved in finding ways to adapt their knowledge and skills to become agents of social action. One of the areas that career development specialists can involve themselves with to help bring about social change is public policy. There is a need for developing networks of individuals to serve as policy actors who can shape public policy and influence its course. A summary of themes from a 1999 symposium on career development and public policy included lack of money, connecting students to opportunities, access and demand for services, policy/practice gaps, and influence and accountability. The purpose of this paper is to raise consciousness of Society of Vocational Psychology (SVP) members and to sensitize them to potential interactions regarding their role in linking career development to public policy. This paper will highlight the work being done in career development and public policy and will serve as an introduction for individuals who are unfamiliar with the topic, while also providing information to broaden the knowledge base of those with an interest in this area.

Knowledge

Vocational psychologists are well suited to shape public policy given their knowledge of job success and satisfaction. Career development specialists can use their expert knowledge derived from empirical studies in the following areas to influence public policy regarding work force development and career guidance: socialization, work, and satisfaction, vocational exploration, career interventions, interests, personality, coping with occupational stress and work-family conflict.

Theory

Career theories can be used to create a system for conceptualizing and organizing public policy as it relates to work and careers. Theories provide a way to bring together disconnected or segmented policies and programs that can lead to improved utilization of career services.

Values

Values influence how concepts and definitions are formed and, in turn, how public policy is shaped. Career specialists can help to redefine public problems using terminology that conveys a different view of an existing problem. Transforming definitions and words can help to expand existing conceptualizations or provide a mechanism for developing new ones. Examples of transforming words and phrases to shape public values include changing *career* to *work life* (Savickas, 2000).

Action

Currently, there is a need for developing networks of individuals to serve as policy actors who can shape public policy and influence its course. Once these individuals are identified, they will be served with the task of developing briefs on the relation between policy and access to career services, costs and benefits of career development interventions, and outcomes for career development across the lifespan, such as sustainable employment, enhanced work performance, and increased job satisfaction. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has outlined a number of policy issues with which career specialists can become involved:

Delivery models

Given their expertise and knowledge, SVP members should consider hosting a conference or producing a consensus document that addresses the linkages between models and delivery systems. The costs and benefits of different delivery models should also be addressed. This is an appropriate topic for vocational psychologists given the riff between scientists and practitioners.

Role of Parties

The task here is to define appropriate roles of parties involved with guidance and psychological services. In order to address this problem, it would be imperative to bring together members of NCDA, SVP, and others organizations who are interested in career service across the lifespan, as well as education and labor market authorities, and community agencies. This could be done in the context of a summit conference were experts from all arenas could share and discuss their ideas to better define their individual and complementary roles.

Financing

Determining what financing models are appropriate for guidance and counseling services calls for a joint initiative with industrial/organizational experts to determine the roles of governments, employers, and individuals. A meta-analysis should be conducted on career interventions to analyze the cost and benefits of individual vs. group programs and services.

Quality

Designing evaluation programs and outcome studies to define, measure, and assess quality of guidance and counseling services is an appropriate task for vocational

psychologists and other career specialists given their skills in research and measurement.

With regard to how to use existing knowledge to understand and address these issues, it is suggested that 1-2 page briefs be developed which are directed toward individuals at the state and federal level. A potential outcome of these briefs could be a symposium at APA or a theme conference for the SVP.

References

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